

80
SHEETS

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Composition Book

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My friend Doug bought me this journal when he visited me in New York ~~about 20 months~~ ^{almost 2 years} ago. I was 6 weeks into my recovery from cytoreduction ^{surgery} which left me with a scar from my chest to my pubic line, twenty-five pounds lighter, and with a bag attached to my stomach to collect all my waste.

I was literally a changed woman—on the exterior and the interior. I had been gutted and could only ~~walk~~ ^{stand} up straight if I ~~pushed my back~~ ^{pressed} on my back to ~~lean~~ ^{push abdomen} myself forward. And my emotions had been bludgeoned with the news that I had late stage metastatic ovarian cancer.

The weekend Doug visited was New York marathon was being raced the weekend Doug visited. I had made an annual pilgrimage to ~~Central Park~~ ^{Central Park} finish line ~~since~~ since moving to Manhattan. This year

my hair stylist was running. I wanted to cheer her on but I hadn't walked any farther than around the block since I got home from the hospital. And that one block was only recent progress, with ~~stops~~ ^{pauses} for rest.

The marathon motivated me to stretch my limits. If Rea could run 26.2 miles, surely I could make the two long blocks to 1st Avenue. Doug carried my folding chair and I sat blissfully watching with appreciation the marathoners race past us. With appreciation and awe I marveled at their strength, endurance, perseverance, pain, and struggle. They raced on and that day marked the beginning of my slow ^{and bumpy} road ~~back~~ to my new normal.

My cancer experience ~~was~~ is marked by mountains.

I picture Mount Ranier at the start of my odyssey.

I was in Washington celebrating my daughter Shelaene's birthday. This was six months to a year (depending on how ~~you~~^{it's} ~~mark~~ ~~count~~ calculated) and ~~had~~ ~~spent~~ post separation from my wife of 17 years, and prior to my daughter's arrival, I spent ~~on~~ ~~my~~ first long-weekend with my new boyfriend. I was bouncing back and forth between the delirium of new love and the despair of divorce.

That weekend I started having a periodic stomach ache and which I credited to an enormous portion of black beans I ate ~~at~~^{at the} ~~the~~ ~~airport~~ ^{layover} in Chicago. ~~on route~~ I also remember looking down at my stomach and commenting that I looked like I was pregnant. I shrugged that off as either excessive period bleeding or vacation eating.

Fast forward to a few days after Shelaine joined me in Seattle. We took the national park narrated Amtrak train to Tacoma and ~~so~~ thrilled to ~~the~~ views ~~mountain~~ of the mountains.

Brenda and Rob, my sister and her husband, picked us up at the station and we drove to their cabin on Harstine Island. The cabin is idyllically located right on the beach at the sound with a full on view of Mount Rainier and an out house 50 steps up the ~~mountain~~ hill of their back yard.

That night, sleeping on my built in cot, my periodic stomach ache turned into an all nighter, and raged with epic twists of agony. At 3am I tiptoed past Rob, who was sleeping on the deck, and hiked up to the out house. Unrelieved I made my way back to bed, stunned at the magnificent

star sparkling sky. At 8am,
hunched over in pain, I repeated the
trek up to the outhouse.

When I set out on my return
voyage I began to perspire. About
1/2 way down the hill ~~my~~ Rob saw
me and said, "You don't look good."

"I don't feel good," I said as
I slumped to the ground and threw
up. ~~Brenda said,~~

Brenda saw me and said, "Stay
right there, I'm taking you to the
emergency room."

As I waited for Brenda and
Shelaine to gather a few things,
I communed with the mountain.
Whenever I think of my cancer
journey, it always starts there,
at the foot of a long and
labyrinthian ascent. It would
test me and torment me like
no other mountain I had
ever climbed.

This was the start of a new,

reduced life, and I did not have the ~~option~~ choice to opt out and crawl back into ~~my~~ the old ~~life~~ ^{me}. The natural curve of my life had taken a sharp, unexpected turn.

Nine months prior to my Mount Ranier moment, I'd been in Peru for two weeks. We hiked the Andes at Machu Picchu, gazed at the mountains of Bolivia from a peak on an island in Lake Titicaca, and ~~had~~ taken a three day hike in Colca Canyon which culminated in a ~~great~~ grueling 3000 foot climb at high elevation. I stood at the summit ~~energized~~ exhilarated. I had pushed through every endurance barrier I had and successfully summited.

Now I was curled up in the backseat of the car en route to the Emergency room.

How could I have stumbled so far so fast? On that day, August 17th, 2015, I was in a hospital for the first time in my life and after a few tests a kind doctor I'd never met broke the news. I was glad that Brenda and Sheline had left the room. The good news, it wasn't diverticulitis; the bad news, it was probably ovarian carcinoma.

I went into shock mode and busied myself with the logistics of getting home ~~and~~ to New York and finding a doctor. I hadn't been to one since my daughter was born 30 years earlier. I was about to enter a new world.

I kept my boyfriend informed as the tests and consults progressed. He flew out ~~for~~ ~~my~~ the day before my surgery and thus began a series of hospitalizations, multiple surgeries, ^{and treatments,} ~~to~~ ~~that~~ punctuated with a terrifying night of excruciating

pain and emergency surgery. That
was touch and go. He's still hanging on
me as we ~~embarked on~~ ^{climbed} ~~the roller coaster~~
and shrieked with fright and screamed
with ~~glutton~~ ^{gluttony} along this ~~18 month~~
roller coaster ride.

When we first entered the car
~~and~~ pulled the safety ~~bar~~ ^{bar} down,
we didn't know if the ^{new} life
together we'd dreamed ~~or~~ about
was ~~on hold~~ ^{debated} or shattered.

We still don't have the answer
to that question. But we persist.
Something I observed to the
extreme in the movie Meru about
climbers in the Himalayas
where you see that failure can
~~sometimes~~ ^{but} lead to success
and sometimes the best thing to
do is surrender and prepare
for a better day.

^{climber} This is my Meru ^{ascend. That}
not sure how or when ^{own} I'll ^{scale} ~~reach~~
the ~~summit~~ ^{peak}. But if all I do
is marvel at ~~the~~ ^{its} majesty and

a journey
in ~~space~~
~~discovery~~
dodges
the yeti
on our
Disney
adventure
that would
be a
Expedition
worst
ride
at
Disney
world.

of mountain views
might, it'll be worth the climb.
Because there's beauty and surprise
along the way.

~~And~~ Next week I'll ~~see the~~ ^{travel to the}
~~Grand Tetons~~. ~~disappointing~~ to Wyoming to
~~celebrate~~ ^{celebrate} ~~my~~ ^{my} ~~own~~ ^{own} Shelaine's ~~to~~
celebrate her 32nd birthday ~~with her~~.
We will also celebrate small
victories as we behold
the Grand Tetons.

We're
~~still~~ still hanging on ~~together~~ ^{together}
as we dodge
the Yeti on our Disney World
Expedition Everest ride.